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ABSTRACT

The argument that driver education should be dropped because driver education cars use gas is shortsighted. High school driver education is an excellent vehicle for teaching concepts of energy conservation. A small investment in fuel now can result in major savings of gasoline over a student's lifetime. In addition good driver education courses graduate well-informed, competent drivers with positive outlooks on responsible driving--an asset that cannot be readily measured in gallons of fuel. The fuel used for high school driver education should be regarded as an investment that can easily be recouped in the first year a person drives after taking the course. (Driver education fuel facts are presented and discussed.) (Author/SA)

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DRIVER EDUCATION SAVES GAS

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It takes an average of 6 gallons of gasoline to prepare a high school driver education student for a lifetime of safe fuel-efficent motoring. Because of recent gasoline shortages, critics of high school driver education have used this issue to urge elimination of this vital course. The energy crisis is merely the newest excuse.

The argument proposed is that driver education cars use gas; therefore dropping the course would save energy. In addition, it is argued that young people should be discouraged from driving. With gasoline in tight supply, who needs more drivers?

Such arguments are short-sighted. Most experts feel that current energy shortages are not short-term phenomena. Rather, they generally concede that the United States may not enjoy energy self-sufficiency until the 1980's---and even this optimistic goal will require crash programs. Meanwhile, our fuel dependency on foreign sourses--and prices for those fuels--will undoubtfully rise.

Clearly, the nation must gear up for a massive energy conservation program. The success of that program will depend on voluntary cooperation from all Americans. Without citizen awareness and cooperation, energy conservation plans will fail.

The will to cooperate is not enough. Citizens must also know how to apply energy-conserving habits to their daily life styles including driving habits. To fill the "knowledge gap", intensive educational programs will be needed to reach motorists.

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HOW DRIVER EDUCATION CAN HELP

High school driver education is an excellent vehicle for teaching concepts of energy conservation. Driver education courses reach new drivers at a time of peak learning interest, before they may develop

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wastful driving habits. In driver education, fuel-saving driving techniques can be constantly stressed and repeatedly practiced in classroom and in-car sessions.

A fact often ignored by critics is that driver education courses plan for the future and set long term goals. A small investment in fuel now can result in major savings of gasoline over a student's lifetime. Eliminating this course would deprive new drivers of a groundwork of facts, concepts and values necessary for them to do their part in conserving fuel.

In addition, good driver education courses graduate well-informed, competent drivers with positive outlooks on responsible driving---an asset that cannot be readily measured in gallons of fuel.

DRIVER EDUCATION FUEL FACTS

Let's look at how much gasoline is used for driver education:

1) 5.96 gallons of gasoline are used per student.

   In a driver education program, 50 students per semester can be taught using one car that would usually travel about 4,000 miles per semester. In a typical two semester program, 100 students would cover 8,000 miles during 80 miles each. Assuming fuel consumption of 13.4 miles per gallon, each student would require 5.96 gallons.

2) 900,000 Barrels of oil are consumed annually for driver education

   Approximately 3 million students take high-school driver education courses each year. At a rate of 6 gallons of gasoline per student, 18 million gallons of gasoline are used annually for in-car instruction of driver education. Since oil refineries currently convert one barrel of oil to approximately 20 gallons of gasoline, 18 million gallons of gasoline could be produced from 900,000 barrels of oil.

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3) 5,253.1 million barrels of oil were used by all motor vehicles in 1972 (1972 figures)[2]

The 900,000 barrels of oil utilized annually for high school driver education is 1/5837th (or less than 2 hundreths of one percent) of the total annual amount that the country consumes for highway transportation. Eliminating driver education would not measurably improve the nation's fuel supply. It would free less than 2500 barrels of oil per day---which is insignificant compared to the benefits derived from their use---for other uses.

4) 14.3 million barrels of oil are used by American motorists each day

5) In the long term, driver education can save fuel

If all of the over 111 million American car and motorcycle drivers had learned fuel conservation methods in driver education, a 10% reduction or more in gasoline use could easily be achieved. This would amount to 525 million barrels of oil saved each year!

Recent Auto Club of Michigan fuel economy tests demonstrated that poor driving habits can drop fuel economy by 23% to 44%. Thus a 10% fuel savings could easily be achieved through driver education.

6) The Typical American motorist consumes more than twice as much gasoline in one week as is needed to prepare a new driver for a lifetime of motoring.

A Typical American driver covers roughly 10,000 miles per year at a rate of approximately 13.4 miles per gallon, using 746 gallons of gasoline annually,[3] and 14.3 gallons weekly. 6 gallons is sufficent to prepare the typical driver education student.

7) The average American driver uses 37,313 gallons of gasoline in a lifetime.

The average driver travels approximately 500,000 miles in a lifetime driving period of 50 years. At the rate of 13.4 miles per gallon, he would then consume 37,313.4 gallons of gasoline in a lifetime. Proper driving habits learned in driver education could easily result in a 10% cut in fuel consumption, saving 3,731 gallons of gasoline per driver over a lifetime.

8) The amount of gasoline one driver uses in a year can be used to teach 124 new drivers.

746 gallons of gasoline annually for one driver. 6 gallons of gasoline times 124 driver education students equals 744 gallons of gasoline.

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CONCLUSION

The 900,000 barrels of oil invested yearly in high school driver education is literally a "drop in the bucket." It should be viewed as an investment, that can easily be recouped in the first year a person drives after taking the course, assuming even a small 2% cut in fuel use resulting from the course. A 2% fuel use cut would equal 15.38 gallons, whereas the course requires 6 gallons. The fuel savings over a lifetime, multiplied by millions of drivers, would be staggering.

If anything, high school driver education should be expanded because of the energy crisis---as an energy conservation measure.

1. P.11. Are We Running Out of Gas?, L.L. Liston, Chief, and J.E. Ullman, Economist, Vehicles and Fuels Branch, Highway Statistics Division, Federal Highway Administration. 1973. Booklet.

2. P.2 Questions and Answers on Energy and the Automobile, American Automobile Association,12/6/73. According to Federal Highway Administration data cited in this report, 105,062 million gallons of gasoline were used by all motor vehicles in 1972. This approximates 5,253.1 million barrels of oil.

3. P.1. IBID

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